

## What Would You Do?

Commitment: The chicken and the pig were walking past the church one day and discussing the problems of world hunger.

The chicken suggested that between her species and the pig's they could provide everyone in the world with a good breakfast of bacon and eggs every morning.

The pig thought long and hard before replying, "That's OK for you to say, because from you that's only a contribution - from me that's total commitment!"

These little jokes have a way of casting light on the truths of life. When it comes to serving God, we are the ones who contribute to God's works. For Jesus it was a total commitment. In our gospel lesson today, it is Jesus' very heart that is involved.

Jesus has traveled to Nain with his disciples and a huge crowd. They meet up with yet another crowd, this time mourners for the dead son of a widow. Do we remember a similar story of a widow? In the time of the prophets, Elijah was sent by God to Zarapeth where he would meet a starving widow with a dying son at home. Elijah was able to bring the boy back to life. That story is found in I Kings 17.

Now, back to our gospel story.

We find the unthinkable has happened - a mother has to bury her child. On top of that, once the ceremony is over, this woman will be left destitute emotionally and financially. This is indeed a scene of heartache.

Jesus' heart literally goes out to her. There is no discussion of faith or background as there was in last week's story of the centurion who sought Jesus' healing for his servant. Jesus feels immediate compassion for the widow. This is not a lukewarm response. The Greek word for compassion is "one's innermost self or feelings, heart, affection, love and ...one's gut. The word for entrails is related to the word compassion, perhaps best rendered in the English with "the pit of the stomach." For Jesus, this encounter is gut-wrenching and he cannot help be moved.

"Do not weep," Jesus tells the widow. Not because he hates to see a woman cry but because he is about to take away the reason for her tears. Remember Jesus' words later to Mary Magdalene at his own tomb? "Woman, why are you weeping?" He was saying you do not have reason to weep any longer. I have taken away the cause of your suffering and pain. Revelation 21 promises that "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes."

In the foreign land of Nain, Divine compassion is at work. But the story does not stop there. 'Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" (v 16)

They all realized they were in a place of holy mystery; that God was at work among them.  
(Luke 7:16 The Message)

How do we react or respond? Is it possible to grasp that God is at work in us, around us, about us? The future promise of God wiping away all tears melds with the continual work of healing among all peoples is a reality. Our challenge is that we do not always recognize it or notice Divine power at work. Even devoted and devout people of faith have a hard time comprehending it.

Frederick Buechner, a Presbyterian minister and acclaimed writer shared his reflection about a very confusing dream he had. Though he did not understand the dream, the feeling he came away with was a sense of blessing and healing:

“The fact that I did not understand its truth did not keep it from being in some sense also a blessed dream, a healing dream, because you do not need to understand healing to be healed or know anything about blessing to be blessed.” (in *A Room Called Remember*, Frederick Buechner)

You do not need to understand healing to be healed or about blessing to be blessed. This is a hopeful message to come away with, especially when we cannot always get our minds around exactly how Jesus raised the widow’s son, healed the centurion’s servant, or makes lame walk and blind see. In his life, death didn’t stop Jesus. In his last days, even death could not hold him. It is a holy mystery...that continues to lead us to be as he was, and do as he did. Let us carry on his mission of compassion and mercy.

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